HOME

Home is Pathwe

Home is the village of Pathwe, Pantanaw Township, Maubin district, Lower Burma. It is located on one of the countless small streams of the Lower Irrawaddy estuary about ninety miles west of Rangoon. The country is a flat alluvium plain dissected by myriads of streams and canals. The monotony of marshy plains is relieved by occasional clumps of trees and tall reeds which flank the streams. The land is a result of depositions of silts from upstream by the Irrawaddy river and its tributaries - a process which is going on today as Lower Burma extends into the bays of Bengal and Martaban. When asked how long his family had lived in the village of Pathwe, U Myaing replied :

"My parents were born here and their parents before them and their's before them - as far back as we can remember."

The village of Pathwe occupies the adjacent banks of three streams at the point where they join.

The larger town of Pantanaw is located some three miles upstream. The section U Myaing lives in is called YWA-GYI-BET (Big-village-side) and is the main residential area of Pathwe. Directly across the stream, which is about 200 feet wide at this point, are YWA-LAY-BET (small-village-side) and PAYA-GYI-DAUNT (Big-pagoda-corner).

YWA-GYI-BET consists of four rows of houses placed 200 feet apart parallel to the main branch of the stream. The rows consist of about fifty houses each and are separated by brick or earth roads. The brick road is raised about three feet to form a passageway in time of floods. Communal lavatories flank both sides of the village rows and the ones on the side of the river have been located about 60 or 70 feet back from the edge of the river "in order not to pollute the water." The lavatories in the village differ from one another, in that some of them are in the house itself and others are outside by a small passageway connected to the house. The houses with lavatories in them depend on the water to carry away the droppings in the rainy season.

21:• Htin Aung E-5• (ca. 1930) 1937 AP1 Burma
Burmese AP4

INTRODUCTION

1. The Rise of a Vernacular Literature in Burma

Burma is a small country lying between the two great countries of India and China, and at a first glance it may perhaps be thought that Burmese civilization has little of originality or individuality, and that it is only a minor branch of the Indian and Chinese civilizations. That is not the case. The peninsula of Indo-China shades into India and China along its borders, but Burma proper, where Burmese is spoken,[1] lies away from these borders, and therefore preserves special characteristics of her own. Surrounded on three sides by highlands and on the fourth by the sea, Burma has always remained insular, more insular even than England. The barriers, however, were not impassable, and there were routes from India and China along which foreign influences came, but in such a restricted way that Burma could absorb them without losing her individuality. Even now, when with better sea communications foreign influences come in more extensively, the power of absorption possessed by Burma and the Burmese still leave them their individuality, and they are still a nation with a civilization of their own.

According to early chronicles which most English scholars, except Mr G. E. Harvey, have accepted as quite reliable, the kingdom of Prome in Lower Burma was flourishing as a civilized State by about the fifth century before Christ. A few centuries earlier the first kingdom, named Tagaung, in Upper Burma, is said to have been founded by a king who came overland from India. He found the natives quite civilized and willing to be more so. That kingdom was destroyed, but was revived and restored by another king from India during the lifetime of the Buddha. It, too, was destroyed and the kingdom of Prome was later founded by a prince of Tagaung. Prome is generally believed to have dominated the regions around

[1] Burma proper is the valley of the Irrawaddy. On the west of it are the Chins and allied tribes, on the north Kachins, and on the east the Shans. They were under the Burmese kings and are now under the Government of Burma. Being backward races, except the Shans, they have no writing.

25; Ferrars E-5 (ca. 1890) 1901 AP1 Burma
Burmese AP4

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3. SUNSET ON THE COAST.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

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4. ESTUARY OF THE SALWEEN.

BURMA remained in isolation throughout the longest period of her history. One result of this was that her type grew more and more distinct. The isolation of Burma was due to her geographical position, not to the prejudice which animates other Mongolian states. Burma is shut away in a coign of the earth between mountain wastes and the ocean. The kindred nations settled within the same natural confines, one after another came under the sway of Burma. They fought among themselves and they traded among themselves; the wars and the commerce of the greater world beyond affected them little. No base of attack was near enough to Burma for the ancient conditions of warfare. On the west the seas were too wide for the transport of armies; on the east serried ranges of hills blocked the efforts of China to push her way to the coast. Burma possessed no staples of trade to encourage

25: Ferrars E-5 (ca. 1890) 1901 APl Burma
Burmese AP4

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0131 Burma possessed no staples of trade to encourage

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2 LANDING-STAGE IN THE TIDAL REGION

enterprise of the peaceable sort. Left entirely to her own resources, she developed her character in independence. It preserves a large measure of its original freshness and charm.

Detached though Burma lay from the contact of other civilisation, the seed-corn of a spiritual influence was brought to her shore from afar, and took root and spread until it pervaded her whole life. The one extraneous influence under which she fell proved of a paramount order. But the inspiration of Buddhism was broadly human, not racial. Every people might take its message to heart in their own individual way. The restraints it enjoined and the ideals it held up became the occasions for Burma to unfold her own inmost nature. The abounding treasury of Buddhist legend furnished the subjects to exercise her poetic fancy. In the fifth century, A.D., long after Buddhism had declined at its source in India, and when it only prevailed in Ceylon, its real progress began among the people who were to give it an enduring home. Buddhism is popularly credited with five hundred millions of adherents. But the seven millions of Burma and perhaps a twentieth of that number in Ceylon, together with the half million Jains of India, are the practical Buddhists of the world. With the rest the profession has sunk to an empty name, as in China and Japan, or it is lax, as in Siam, or it is utterly transformed, as in Tibet.

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The phrase *Further India* gives point to a wide misconception. The surprise of so many persons on finding that the Burmans have no *caste*—to take the commonest instance—betrays the notion that Burma is part of India

6 RUINS OF CITY GATE, PAGAN

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APPENDIX D.

STATISTICAL.

AREA.

131 Burma Proper and Pegu (excluding Shan States, 61,000 sq. m.)
square miles . . . . . 158,323 = 101,326,122 acres.
Area cropped, 1900 . . . . . 10,556,104 acres.

161 POPULATION IN 1901 (including Shan States, 1,228,460) . 9,221,181

Mean annual birth-rate per 1,000 . . . . . 37·34
" death " " . . . . . 28·16

DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION IN 1891.

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Burmans and Talaings	{ males, 3,030,797 / females, 3,098,385 }	6,129,182
	(Increase since 1881, 22¼ per cent.)	
Shans		206,794
Karéns		633,657
Chins		95,571
Chimpáws (Kachin ? more)		2,200
Chinese		37,407
Natives of India		432,699
Europeans (including 4000 troops)		12,491
Eurasians		6,978
Others		167,134
Total, census of 1891		7,722,053

FISCAL.

178 In 1796 the special impost of 33·3 tikals of fine silver per house took three years to collect,
651 and produced the equivalent of about nine million rupees. The purchasing-power of money has declined 50 to 60 per cent. since that time, apart from depreciation of silver.

435 In 1900 the gross revenue of Burma was 70,400,000 rupees, of which Pegu contributed 63 per cent. The expenditure was forty-three millions. Out of the surplus there was a balance of Rs. 24,700,000 of Imperial revenue over expenditure. The incidence of direct taxation (land and capitation taxes, which produce about one-half of the revenue) is four rupees per head of population; which, with an average of 5·5 inhabitants, comes to twenty-two rupees per house.

CRIMINAL, AVERAGES 1894-8.

674

Convictions for offences against life (including attempted murder and culpable homicide, 40 per cent.)	244
" " hurt	2,691
" " rape	76
" " robbery	654
" " theft	8,681